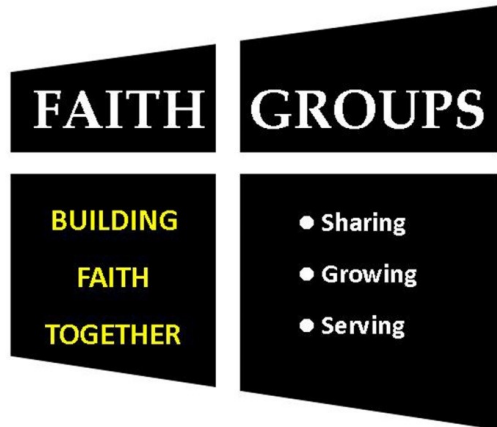


“Here I Stand We Go!”

*Building a Church for the
Next 500 Years*



Fall 2017
Faith Groups Study
and Devotional

Guidelines for Faith Groups Discussions

Each session is designed for about one and a half hours, but let the flow of the conversation determine how long each one lasts.

The Bible texts and devotions are provided so that participants may read them before their Faith Group meets each week. They may also be read together at the beginning of each meeting.

We encourage each Faith Group to begin and end each session with prayer. Invite participants to lead or join in the prayers as they feel able to do so.

Each week, look back to how God has been working in your life in light of the previous Faith Group discussion.

Be gracious and supportive of one another in your Faith Group. Remember to keep any personal information that may be shared confidential.

God will be present as you meet! “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” – Matthew 18:20

“Here I Stand We Go!”
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Faith Group Discussion

Session 7

“The Holy Possession of the Cross (Suffering)”



Growing...

1. Why do we so often think that God is against us when we experience suffering?
2. How have you seen a “Jesus follows us” emphasis in American theology? How have you seen that in your own life?
3. What are the crosses that we as a church might be called to bear?
4. What are the crosses that you might be called to bear?
5. What are you struggling with right now?
6. Go around your group and pray for each other, asking for strength and faith in the face of suffering.

Weekly Devotion

Session 1

“The Word of God”

“Receiving God’s Word”

By Jon Gelschus

(Based on Mark 4:1-9, 27-29)

I have been on many mission trips, both for youth and adults. I have seen lives changed and how the Word is received and rejected. Mark 4 gives me the understanding on how and why the Word is received. I’ve watched how the youth grow and do great works while on mission trips, and seen how fast the “thorns” can choke the growth. I’ve seen the outright hardness of people that discard the Word even when given in great intent. I reflect on being good soil and realize that I won’t be weed free; therefore, it’s important to care for what we are given. I also know that Jesus forgives, loves and won’t give up on me. Thanks be to God!

Father, let me be good soil so that your Word may fill me and grow through me, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, Sept. 17

Video Notes Session 7

“The Holy Possession of the Cross (Suffering)”

1. Where there is a church, there will be a _____, and there will be _____.
2. They knew that they had everything they _____ in Christ.
3. First, because we are _____ to follow.
4. Secondly, we follow Jesus because our _____ needs us to.
5. Finally, we follow Jesus, boldly, even into _____, because we know he is with us.
6. The cross will _____ us.



Sharing...

If someone were to ask you what God has been teaching you as you have done this study, what would your answer be?



Serving... (see prayer on page 4)

“We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20 NLT

This week let the Holy Spirit work in you so that you may boldly declare how God has worked in your life.

Dear Lord, please help me to:

**Take a little time today
To mend a broken heart
Or gather up the pieces
Of a dream that’s torn apart
Extend a hand to someone
Who really needs a friend...**

**Take a little time today
To help make life worthwhile
For a stranger who can use
An understanding smile...**

**Reach for heaven and reflect
The sunshine from above
Take a little time today
To radiate God’s love. Amen**

...Roy Mathews 4

Pray this prayer
each week to
prepare your
heart for the
serving God has
in mind for you.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, Oct. 29

Video Notes ~ Session 1 ~ “The Word of God”

1. The phrase, _____ (Word alone) became a slogan for the Reformation.
2. Luther said, “God’s Word cannot be without God’s _____ and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s _____.”
3. “. . .for that Word shall not return _____”
4. What does Luther mean by “the Word of God?”
_____ , _____ , _____
5. The Word creates _____.



Sharing...

If you could learn any skill, what would it be and why?



Serving... (see prayer on opposite page)

“For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13 NLT

Pray that you will be led to empty yourself in service to God, proclaiming the Christ who gave His life for you.

“Here I Stand We Go!”
Building a Church for the Next 500 Years

Faith Group Discussion Session 1
“The Word of God”



Growing...

1. Why is the Word of God a mark of a true Christian church?
2. What does it mean that the Bible is “inspired”? How does that work?
3. What does theologian Gerhard Forde mean when he says that proclamation is “the attempt to do the text to the hearers, to do once again in the living present what the text records as having been done of old”
4. Read Hebrews 4:12-13. How is the word of God like a double-edged sword? How have you experienced this?
5. How does God’s Word give you life in the midst of your day-to-day world?

Weekly Devotion

Session 7

**“The Holy Possession
of the Cross”**

“From Suffering to Hope”

By Marsha Schmit
(Based on Romans 5:1-9)

After my near-death accident in 1993, things were hard, not only physically but emotionally as well. I questioned God when I didn’t feel happy to be alive and wondered why *my* life was spared while others weren’t given that chance. I struggled with depression and found it difficult to have any hope. I felt like a part of me had died, and I was scared that I had to live the rest of my life feeling that way. But God brought His Good News to me through others—my pastors, my friends and family, and my Faith family, too. God walked beside me until one day I wrote in my journal, “I’m back!”

I’m not quite sure how we ever got the idea that because Jesus died on the cross for our sins, our suffering would be less or even non-existent. Romans 5 tells us the opposite and even tells us to boast about it! Why? Because as Paul reminds us, out of our suffering, endurance is produced and while we endure, our character is developed and from this character comes hope. “And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (vs. 5)

God brought me through that difficult time in my life, helped me to endure, built my character and brought me hope just as he does for all of us when we suffer.

Thank you, Lord, for pouring your love into our hearts and for giving us hope. Amen.

“Here I Stand We Go!”
Building a Church for the Next 500 Years

Faith Group Discussion Session 6
“Prayer, Public Praise, Thanksgiving to God”



Growing...

1. Why do you think *gathering together* for public worship has always been central to the life of the Church? What for you personally is the value of gathering for worship?
2. Why is worship apparently unappealing to so many people? Are there parts of worship that do not appeal to you? How can the church “sell” the value of worship better?
3. The video discussed the *catechetical* or teaching purpose of public worship. What have you learned through the weekly rhythm of worship? How has it shaped your faith?
4. Is Robert Jenson right to say that our society is still deeply shaped by Christianity even as it rejects and attacks it? What evidence of that do you see?
5. How is public worship essential to “building a church for the next 500 years?”

Weekly Devotion

Session 2

“Holy Baptism”

“Washed Clean”

By Elaine Blade

(Based on Romans 6:1-11 and Matthew 28:16-20)

“By no means!” Paul’s response to the question raised in Romans 6 regarding freedom to sin leaves no doubt that that is not what Paul is talking about. Freedom *from* sin does not mean freedom *to* sin! Jesus died for our sins and our sinful selves died with Him. We were raised to new life when Jesus was resurrected. We are no longer under sin’s control.

In the church of Paul’s day, immersion was the usual form of baptism. I like that image because the whole person is covered in water—washed clean of every sin. The symbolism of the resurrection as the person rises out of the water is powerful—risen to a new life in Christ Jesus.

With this new life in Christ, we are changed and no longer slaves to sin but workers in His kingdom. We are given the command to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And, here’s the promise—“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Dearest Jesus, strengthen our faith and trust in You as our Savior and Lord, and send us forth in joy to do your will. Amen.

**Video Notes ~ Session 6 ~
“Prayer, Public Praise, Thanksgiving to God”**

1. Worshiping _____ has been central to the life of the Church from the beginning.
2. Worship is where we _____ from God His divine gifts through Word and Sacrament.
3. Christianity is actually _____ instead: The life of the church and of worship brings us again and again into a relationship with God—one of love and trust.
4. Worship serves the vital role of _____ in Christian faith, theology, values, morals—it shapes us!
5. “It’s vital, in the life of the church, to teach Christians what it means to be a _____.”
6. Each time we gather in worship it brings us directly into the _____ of the living God.



Sharing...

Do you most like sunrise, daylight, twilight, or night? Share why you picked your time of day.



Serving... (see prayer on page 4)

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” RSV

Look for the opportunity to be Jesus’ hands and feet this week.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, Oct. 22

Video Notes ~ Session 2 ~ “Holy Baptism”

1. As the old sinner in us is drowned daily through _____ and the new _____ is daily called forth.
2. It’s a promise that lasts our _____ life; it even delivers us into _____ life.
3. Baptism is a mark of the church because the church is a _____ of the baptized.



Sharing...

Name a gift you will never forget.



Serving... (see prayer on page 4)

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” 1 John 3:18 NIV

What action can you take this week to help a stranger?

“Here I Stand We Go!”
Building a Church for the Next 500 Years

Faith Group Discussion Session 2 “Holy Baptism”



Growing...

1. When and where were you baptized? What do you know about that day?
2. What is baptism all about? Why do we do it, and what's happening in it?
3. How is your baptism important in your life? Does it change anything about how you live? If not, how might baptism change things in your life?
4. At Faith, why do we place the newly baptized into the arms of a member? What does that symbolize? How might we live that our better?
5. Read Titus 3:4-7. What do these verses say about baptism?

Weekly Devotion

Session 6

**“Prayer, Public Praise,
Thanksgiving to God”**

“Why We Worship”

By Paul Cravens
(Based on Psalm 95:1-7)

As we go about our lives, it is often easy for us to forget exactly why we worship. We come to church every week, where we confess our sins, sing songs, and hear Scripture and its interpretation. But in our Midwestern culture, church can become a routine, and many of us have known nothing else for our entire lives. Worship should be our response to God, an overflow of praise that we cannot help but release; it is not a task to complete for its own sake. Psalm 95 illustrates why.

The first seven verses of this Psalm are an illustration of God framed by exhortations to praise him. “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.” As if we needed any encouragement, the middle strophe declares, “in his hands are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” Our God created the universe. Our God handcrafted each one of us, and it is His sovereign and unstoppable will that we should be reunited with Him. Faced with this realization, we no longer ask why we worship. We must instead ask, rhetorically, “How can we not?”

Heavenly Father, our personal worship is sometimes stale and without emotion. Open our hearts that we may worship in response to You. Amen.

“Here I Stand We Go!”
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Faith Group Discussion Session 5 “Ministers”



Growing...

1. Who are some pastors whom God has used to impact your faith? What qualities did they have that impacted you?
2. Why are pastors always the designated pray-ers?
3. Why was the historical episcopate such a theological hang-up for so many Lutherans, including us at Faith? What are “the goods” that a minister is called to hand over? How/when does this happen?
4. How do you/might you support your pastors?
5. Read Romans 10:11-17. How does this apply to pastors? How does it apply to you? Are your feet beautiful?

Weekly Devotion Session 3 “Holy Communion”

“From Darkness into Light”

By Richard Settergren
(Based on Luke 22:14-20)

As I sit in the congregation and the pastor says, “Take and eat. This is my body. Take and drink. This is my blood,” I am overcome with emotion. My thoughts are surrounded by doubt. Why do I deserve this? What did I do that someone would love me so much to give himself to me? Am I worthy of what I am about to receive?

Now as I walk forward, I fold my hands and bow my head. I come forward in a cloak of hunger and darkness that my sin has cast upon me.

As I eat the bread, I feel the hunger inside me is filled. How? Easy. Jesus’ body reminds me that he was also human and knows how bad temptation is for us.

As I drink the juice/wine, I feel the cloak of darkness lift from my body. I am reminded as I drink, that I am loved unconditionally and forever. It is not based on what I do or don’t do. He will always be there for me.

As I return to my seat, I am full and in a bright light.

To me, communion is love and forgiveness.

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us your Son, Jesus, to die for us and for the remembrance of Him in and through Holy Communion. Amen.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, Oct. 1

Video Notes ~ Session 5 ~ “Ministers”

1. The grace given to ministers is the same _____ given to all Christians.
2. Ministry is the concrete carrying out of the divine _____ now authorized and commissioned by Jesus.
3. But you _____ ministers so that someone can make sure the life-saving message of Jesus is _____.



Sharing...

If you could safely travel to any place in the world, where would you go?



Serving... (see prayer on page 4)

“As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” 1 Peter 4:10 RSV

Nobody is good at everything. We need each other. Team up with others to put your faith in action.

Video Notes ~ Session 3 ~ “Holy Communion”

1. Luther changed the _____ as little as possible.
2. Canon of the mass saw Holy Communion as a mysterious _____ that occurred at the altar.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, Oct. 15

3. Holy Communion is not a _____ that we offer up to God...
- 4but rather it is God, in Christ, coming down to us with His _____ of grace.
5. Holy Communion is all based on Christ's Word and _____ to us.
6. His body and blood are _____ in, with and under the bread and wine.
7. The chief purpose of Holy Communion is the _____ of sins.
8. Communion builds _____.



Sharing...

Name a gift you will never forget.



Serving... (see prayer on page 4)

**“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” 1Thessalonians 5:11
RSV**

Everyone is fighting some kind of battle. What can you do this week to help mend a broken heart?

“Here I Stand We Go!”
Building a Church for the Next 500 Years

Faith Group Discussion Session 3
“Holy Communion”



Growing...

1. Martin Luther made as few changes as possible in the liturgy. What is the value of keeping traditions like the liturgy? What church traditions do you value most?
2. Why is the “direction” of the liturgy, especially Holy Communion, so important? Why is it so easy for us to turn the direction around? What gets lost when we do?
3. What promises do you hear Jesus making to you in the sacrament of Holy Communion?
4. What is the doctrine of Real Presence? Do you find it hard to believe? Can we trust the plain meaning of Jesus’ words, when we cannot understand how it happens?
5. How would you describe the role of Holy Communion in “building a church for the next 500 years?”

Weekly Devotion

Session 5

“Ministers”

“Answering His Call”

By Roxanna Boe
(Based on John 21:15-17)

While we have ordained ministers to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, we are all called to be “ministers.” How we answer the Lord’s call to “feed and tend His sheep” is an individual response. It may depend on the gifts you feel you have been given. And, it may depend on our openness to hear and respond to God’s call. It is so easy to feel, “Oh, He’s not calling me. I don’t have special gifts for ministry. I can’t sing. I can’t teach. I can’t lead a group; I’m not “good enough.” My mother used to say, “I’m just a jack of all trades and a master of none.” That fits so many of us. We can do many things, but really don’t feel we excel at anything...so we hesitate to jump in and accept ministry roles in our congregation, in our circle of friends and activities, and in our community. With God’s grace, we can, and will be, blessed to be a blessing if we take that leap of faith. It might be teaching Sunday School, mentoring a confirmand, helping in the office or kitchen, mowing the lawn, or praying for the sick, our pastors, and our congregation. It might be something so small, yet so important, as giving a newcomer a smile! Through prayer and time spent in His Word, we can ask for the Lord’s guidance in doing His Will with our lives. In answering His call, we will be blessed beyond measure!

Heavenly Father, thank you for calling us to ministry in big and small ways. Help us to answer that call with a resounding, “Yes!” Amen.

“Here I Stand We Go!”

Building a Church for the Next 500 Years

Faith Group Discussion Session 4 “Office of the Keys”



Growing...

1. Look at Matthew 16:13-23. What in the text suggests that the “rock” on which the Church is built is Peter’s confession and not Peter himself?
2. Did you know that all Christians, not just pastors, have “the keys of the kingdom”? Try to recall a time when you used them or imagine a time when you might use them.
3. Imagine some real-life situations in the life of our congregation where the binding key would need to be used? How could the congregation do it in a way that is perceived as loving and not simply judgmental?
4. Why is the freedom to do whatever we want really bondage and being bound to Christ as Lord really freedom?
5. What is the role of the Office of the Keys in “building a church for the next 500 years?”

Weekly Devotion

Session 4

“Office of the Keys”

“A gift to Us”

By Niki Pokornowski
(Based on: John 20:19-23)

When the disciples first saw Jesus after the resurrection, they did not know what to believe. They were sad at what had happened to Jesus, and because they did not understand the wonderful way God works, they were confused to see Jesus alive again. We hear in John 20:22-23, “Jesus breathed on His disciples and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; and if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’” He sent them, as He is sending us, to bring the good news to the whole world. Jesus was leaving the earth physically but promised God would be with them, through the Holy Spirit living in them. As they proclaimed the Gospel, they could honestly tell people who believed in that message that their sins were forgiven, and they could honestly tell people that did not believe in the message that their sins were not forgiven and that they would stand condemned in God’s eyes.

The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to us. He helps us to believe what we might not without Him. Believers today have the very same calling given to us! We are asked to share the Gospel message with others in the world. And we go about that mission with the Holy Spirit living inside us, guiding us as we share His truth. We are called to tell people the only way to be forgiven is through faith. Praise be to God.

Dear God, thank you for forgiving our sins even though we don’t deserve it. Help us too, to forgive the sins of others. Amen.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, Oct. 8

Video Notes ~ Session 4 ~ “Office of the Keys”

1. Loose meant to be _____ of sin.
2. To bind sin meant it _____ to you.
3. In the Roman Catholic Church, Jesus’ words were understood to mean that _____ himself was the rock by which the church would be built.
4. Luther and Protestants read Matthew 16 to understand that the “rock” on which the church is built is not Peter himself, but on his _____.
5. So we believe that the keys of the kingdom are _____ to all Christians.
6. ...and then absolution is _____ by _____ authority.
7. Of course, the forgiveness of sin is absolutely _____ to the Gospel.



Sharing...

Does your name have a special meaning or were you named after someone?



Serving... (see prayer on page 4)

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13 NIV

Pray that God would help you to let go of any grudge or grievance you may be harboring.